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978-1-107-03549-2 - Labor Divided in the Postwar European Welfare State:  
The Netherlands and the United Kingdom

Dennie Oude Nijhuis

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## Labor Divided in the Postwar European Welfare State

This book explains how the success of attempts to expand the boundaries of the postwar welfare state in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom depended on organized labor's willingness to support redistribution of risk and income among different groups of workers. By illuminating and explaining differences within and between labor union movements, it traces the historical origins of "inclusive" and "dual" welfare systems. In doing so, the book shows that labor unions either can have a profoundly conservative impact on the welfare state or can act as an impelling force for progressive welfare reform. Based on an extensive range of archive material, this book explores the institutional foundations of social solidarity.

Dennie Oude Nijhuis is assistant professor of history at Leiden University. He has been a visiting lecturer at Bilgi University, Istanbul University, and Chulalongkorn University and a research Fellow at Yale University's Department of Political Science. Oude Nijhuis specializes in the comparative political economy of labor markets and welfare states and the political economy of European integration. His work has been published in *World Politics*, *Labor History*, *Twentieth Century British History*, and the *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*. His thesis was shortlisted for the annual Dutch Political Science Association (NKWP) Dissertation Award. He has received an NWO-Rubicon grant for a research proposal that aimed to uncover the determinants of organized labor support for redistribution. In 2011 he was awarded the best article of the year prize on a non-U.S. or comparative topic by the journal *Labor History*.

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# Labor Divided in the Postwar European Welfare State

*The Netherlands and the United Kingdom*

DENNIE OUDE NIJHUIS

*Leiden University*



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## Preface

The first decades after World War II undoubtedly presented a crucial epoch in the development of the modern welfare state. Within a time span of only a few decades, all industrialized countries succeeded in creating intricate systems of social protection that raised many of their citizens out of poverty, significantly reduced market-generated income disparities, and greatly diminished the financial consequences of labor market risks such as unemployment, sickness, disability, and old age. In the immediate postwar period, the bulk of the population living in the industrialized world relied on grossly inadequate levels of protection against hardships resulting from labor market risks. Some thirty years later, many industrialized countries had succeeded in creating cradle-to-grave protection against such hardships for them. The consequences of this for the state's role in society and the improvement it brought to citizens' daily lives were truly astounding.

Yet, crucially, these improvements were by no means shared equally in all parts of the industrialized world. While all industrialized countries experienced sharp increases in both public and private social expenditure in the decades following World War II, they differed markedly in the overall level of this increase, the division within what is popularly known as the "public and private mix," and the degree to which national programs came to contain redistributive features. As a result, they came to differ greatly in their ability to protect their members against the risk of economic misfortune. Most important, they came to differ greatly in their ability to provide adequate levels of social protection for *all* their members. This difference, while grounded in the first decades of the postwar period, has persisted in subsequent years. The countries that created the most solidaristic welfare states in the first postwar decades still provide the most inclusive and redistributive insurance programs. Conversely, the countries that created dual systems of private and public insurance, under which the

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most affluent enjoyed the highest levels of security while the less affluent often lacked proper insurance, have maintained this duality up to the present day.

This book results from the conviction that we cannot improve our understanding of postwar welfare state development in different countries, and their widely diverging trajectories, without a fundamental reappraisal of organized labor's involvement in the creation and expansion of social policies during the crucial first decades of the postwar period. In some ways this reappraisal seems long overdue. For more than a decade now, traditional labor-centered accounts of the welfare state have been subjected to severe criticism from what can be broadly described as employer-oriented writings. The main purpose of this literature has been to show that employer interest groups have often played a more important, and a more cooperative, role in the development of social policies than previously realized. Yet their strong condemnation of the prominent role attributed to class divisions in much of the literature has obvious consequences for our understanding of organized labor's involvement in the coming about of progressive welfare reform as well. Recent work on welfare state retrenchment, by pointing to left divisions, has similarly provided findings that give good cause to reconsider organized labor's role in the creation and expansion of the welfare state.

So far, and as will be explained at length in Chapter 1 of this book, this much-needed reconsideration has failed to materialize, though. In much of the literature on welfare state development, including nearly all recent writings on the role of employers, labor unions continue to be viewed as natural supporters of the welfare state – including its redistributive consequences. Instances of labor union support for progressive welfare state reform are still generally understood as a logical outcome of workers' interest in obtaining security against labor market risks. Instances of union opposition to the creation and expansion of social insurance programs, if recognized at all, continue to be explained through “voluntarist” notions that emphasize union suspicions of state motives and their fear that increased state intervention might affect their future ability to attract workers.

This treatment of organized labor, I have come to believe, does not do justice to the very diverse and often conflicting nature of workers' demands for security against labor market risks. Nor does it sit well with the fact that the welfare state is mainly about redistributing risk and income between different categories of workers rather than between “capital” and “labor” or “rich” and “poor.” This book emphasizes that labor unions, depending on their internal organizational blueprint, value these redistributive consequences in strikingly different ways. My central argument is that the internal organizational structure of labor unions has therefore been of major, and neglected, importance for the success of progressive welfare reform in the first decades of the postwar period.

In recent years, much of the most exciting research on welfare state development has come from a scholarship that has sought to emphasize organized

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employers' contribution to welfare state development. This book instead lends support to traditional labor-oriented writings by emphasizing organized labor's central role in the coming about of progressive welfare reform. This is not to say that employers have not been influential. The book merely emphasizes the proactive role of labor unions in voicing demands for improved protection for workers against labor market risks and converting these demands into concrete welfare initiatives. In addition, and far more important, it shows that organized employers' responses to demands for increases in public protection against labor market risks depended greatly on organized labor's willingness and ability to support redistribution of risk and income among different categories of workers.

To illustrate my claims, I chose to compare the postwar welfare trajectories of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries not only provided ideally divergent institutional contexts, but their welfare trajectories are also strongly at odds with conventional (class-oriented) explanations of postwar welfare state development. Perhaps partly as a result of this, both countries are also relatively understudied by comparativists. The goal of this book is therefore not only to revisit our view of organized labor's involvement in the development of the postwar welfare state but also to offer a detailed and alternative history of the coming about of progressive welfare reform, or lack thereof, in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Some readers may have doubts about the generalizability of my findings to countries other than the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For them I have included numerous references to and expositions on other European countries as well as the United States.

In a world where political actors go to great lengths to mask internal divisions, and where strategic behavior often conceals true preferences, establishing social causality can be a difficult task. Uncovering these divisions and real preferences required many months of archive research. These archival forays first opened my eyes to the strong degree to which labor unions, and to some extent also employer interest groups, are driven by normative orientations that emphasize fairness and/or solidarity with weaker group members. By neglecting this and focusing almost completely on rational self-interests, the existing literature has failed to capture a major force behind the success – or failure – of redistributive welfare state development. Partly as a result of this, such terms as “solidarity” and “egalitarianism” are used with frustrating inadequacy. I can only hope that my treatment of these terms is sufficiently precise to offer a conceptual improvement.

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During my numerous archival ventures, I received generous and patient assistance from archivists at the National Archives in London, the Modern Records Centre in Coventry, the International Institute of Social History, the National Archives of the Netherlands (Nationaal Archief), the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW), the Radboud University Nijmegen's Catholic Documentation Center (Katholiek Documentatiecentrum), the VU University Amsterdam's Historic Documentation Center of Dutch Protestantism (Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands protestantisme), and the Dutch Social Security Agency (Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen). The archivists include Frank Kanhai, Lodewijk Winkeler, Piet Hazenbosch, Hans Seijlhouwer, Teun van Lier, and Carroll Lewis.

Academically, I am foremost indebted to Richard Griffiths, who has been my mentor from the first day I walked into his undergraduate lecture up to the present day. I am also grateful to Jeroen Touwen, who not only encouraged me to venture into academics but also proved to be a great source of support and friendly advice in subsequent years. Sharing an interest in economics and labor-related matters, our many discussions broadened my horizon. My greatest thanks go to Peter Swenson, whose work on labor markets and welfare states has reoriented comparative political economy research during the past

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decade. I am extremely grateful for his enthusiastic support for this book and many comments. Moreover, his commitment to critical research and nonconformism continue to inspire me.

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## Abbreviations

### THE UNITED KINGDOM

AAS	Association of Approved Societies
AEEU	Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union
BEC	British Employers' Confederation
CAWU	Clerical and Administrative Workers' Unions
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CPSA	Civil and Public Services Association
EETPU	Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union
FBI	Federation of British Industries
GMWU	General and Municipal Workers' Union
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
LOA	Life Offices' Association
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers
NEDC	National Economic Development Council
NEDO	National Economic Development Office
NFPW	National Federation of Professional Workers
NJAC	National Joint Advisory Council
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUS	National Union of Seamen
NUVB	National Union of Vehicle Builders
PEP	Political and Economic Planning
RMT	National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers
SERPS	State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme
STOP	Save the Occupational Pension
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union

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TSSA Transport Salaried Staffs' Association  
 TUC Trades Union Congress

## THE NETHERLANDS

AAW Algemene Arbeidsongeschiktheidswet (General Disability Act)  
 AKWV Algemene Katholieke Werkgeversvereniging (General Catholic Employers' Federation)  
 AOW Algemene Ouderdomswet (General Old Age Act)  
 CNV Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond (Christian Union Federation)  
 CSWV Centraal Sociaal Werkgevers Verbond (Central Social Employers' Federation)  
 FCWW Federatie van Katholieke en Protestants-Christelijke Werkgeversverbonden (Federation of Catholic and Protestant-Christian Employers' Unions)  
 FNV Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (Federation Dutch Labor Movement)  
 FvB Federatie van Bedrijfsverenigingen (Federation of Industrial Councils)  
 GMD Gemeenschappelijke Medische Dienst (Common Medical Service)  
 KAB Katholieke Arbeidersbeweging (Catholic Workers Movement)  
 KVP Katholieke Volkspartij (Catholic People's Party)  
 KVV Katholiek Verbond van Werkgeversvakverenigingen (Catholic Federation of Employers' Unions)  
 MHP Vakcentrale voor Middelbaar en Hoger Personeel (Federation for Middle and Higher Level Personnel)  
 NCW Nederlands Christelijk Werkgeversverbond (Christian Employers' Federation)  
 NKV Nederlands Katholiek Vakverbond (Netherlands Catholic Trade Union Federation)  
 NVV Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (Dutch Association of Trade Unions)  
 PvdA Partij van de Arbeid (Labor Party)  
 RKWV Rooms-Katholiek Werkliedenverbond (Roman Catholic Workers' Federation)  
 RvBA Raad van Bestuur in Arbeidszaken (Council of Directors in Labor Affairs)  
 RVV Raad van Vakcentralen (Council of Trade Union Federations)  
 SER Sociaal-Economische Raad (Social-Economic Council)  
 SVR Sociale Verzekeringsraad (Social Insurance Council)  
 VNO Verbond van Nederlandse Ondernemingen (Federation of Dutch Industries)



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VPCW	Verbond van Protestantisch-Christelijke Werkgevers in Nederland (Federation of Protestant-Christian Employers)
VUT	Vervroegde Uittreding (Early Retirement)
WAO	Wet op Arbeidsongeschiktheidsverzekering (Act on Disability Insurance)
WW	Werkloosheidswet (Unemployment Act)
WWV	Wet Werkloosheidsvoorziening (Unemployment Provision Act)

## THE UNITED STATES

AFL	American Federation of Labor
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations

## SWEDEN

ATP	Allmän Tilläggspension
LO	Landsorganisationen i Sverige
SAF	Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen

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## A Note on Sources

The comparison of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in this book draws on a variety of secondary and primary sources. The use of the latter demands some clarification. The search for primary sources to support my argument sent me to both sides of the North Sea. Most valuable for this research were the minutes of various committees of the major union (con)federations in the two countries. In the United Kingdom, these minutes came from the Trades Union Congress (TUC). In the Netherlands, these union federations were (in order of influence) the socialist Dutch Association of Trade Unions<sup>1</sup> (Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen, henceforth NVV); the Catholic Workers Movement (Katholieke Arbeidersbeweging, henceforth KAB); its successor, the Netherlands Catholic Trade Union Federation (Nederlands Katholiek Vakverbond, henceforth NKV); and the protestant Christian Union Federation (Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond, henceforth CNV). When important decisions in the field of welfare were to be made, the social security experts and leadership of these federations often met in the Council of Trade Union Federations (Raad van Vakcentralen, henceforth RVV).

Both because one of the purposes of this work is to show how union structure matters to the involvement of employer interest groups in welfare state

<sup>1</sup> The English translations of these Dutch organizations are mostly taken from William van Voorden, "Employers Associations in the Netherlands." In John P. Windmuller and Alan Gladstone, *Employers Associations and Industrial Relations: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Joris van Ruyseveldt and Jelle Visser, *Industrial Relations in Europe: Traditions and Transitions* (London: Sage, 1996). On some occasions these authors used different translations. While Van Voorden, for example, writes of the Federation of Dutch Industries to describe the VNO, Van Ruyseveldt and Visser use the name Federation of Dutch Enterprises. On such occasions I have allowed myself some academic freedom in choosing one or the other. Similarly, the Sociaal-Economische Raad (SER) is sometimes translated as Socio-Economic Council, Social and Economic Council, and Social-Economic Council. In this case, I have opted for the last. Finally, the Vakcentrale voor Middelbaar en Hoger Personeel has been previously translated as Federation of White-Collar Staff Organizations, the Dutch Trade Union Confederation for Middle and Higher Employees, the Federation of Managerial and Professional Staff Unions, and in many other ways. In this case, I have chosen to use the name Federation for Middle and Higher Level Personnel because this seemed closest to its original meaning.

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development and because the records of such groups also provided valuable information on the actions of unions, this work also draws heavily on the minutes of various committee and board meetings of important employer federations. In the United Kingdom, these federations were the Federation of British Industries (FBI), the British Employers' Confederation (BEC), and their predecessor, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). In the Netherlands, there were so many employer federations that it would take too much space here to list them exhaustively. Of most importance for this research were the minutes of the liberal Central Social Employers' Federation (Centraal Sociaal Werkgevers Verbond, henceforth CSWV) and those of its successor, the Federation of Dutch Industries (Verbond van Nederlandse Ondernemingen, henceforth VNO). Of slightly less importance were the minutes of the Catholic Federation of Employers' Unions (Katholiek Verbond van Werkgeversvakverenigingen, henceforth KVW) and the General Catholic Employers' Federation (Algemene Katholieke Werkgeversvereniging, henceforth AKWV), the Federation of Protestant-Christian Employers in the Netherlands (Verbond van Protestantsch-Christelijke Werkgevers in Nederland, henceforth VPCW), and the general-confessional Federation of Catholic and Protestant-Christian Employers' Unions (Federatie van Katholieke en Protestants-Christelijke Werkgeversverbonden, henceforth FCWV) and Christian Employers' Federation (Nederlands Christelijk Werkgeversverbond, henceforth NCW). As was the case with their union counterparts, the social security experts and leadership of these various employer federations often held meetings in a common platform, called the Council of Directors in Labor Affairs (Raad van Bestuur in Arbeidszaken, or RvBA).

Other primary sources also proved useful. The research on the United Kingdom relies on various government records found in the Public Record Office. Of particular importance were minutes of meetings and correspondence from officials of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, the Department of Health and Social Security, and departments that were responsible for labor and unemployment matters. For the discussion on superannuation in the United Kingdom, I also used records from the Life Offices' Associations (LOA), the main representative of the British insurance industry. Finally, I used several publications issued by various Labour governments, employer federations, and individual unions. For the research on the Netherlands, I interviewed several social security experts and leaders from important unions and used records from the Ministry of Social Affairs. For the discussion on the use of social security programs for early retirement purposes in the Netherlands in Chapter 7, I made extensive use of archives from organizations responsible for the implementation of these programs, including the Common Medical Service (Gemeenschappelijke Medische Dienst, or GMD), the Federation of Industrial Councils (Federatie van Bedrijfsverenigingen, or FvB), and the Social Insurance Council (Sociale Verzekeringsraad, or SVR). When I did my research, these were located at the headquarters of the Dutch Social Security Agency (Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekering). Recently, they have been moved to the National Archives of the Netherlands.